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Why a Military Man?

President Johnson reportedly conducted an intensive talent hunt before hitting on a retired Navy man, Vice Adm. William F. Raborn, Jr., to replace John A. McCone as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Presumably, then, Raborn is in Mr. Johnson's carefully considered judgment the very best man for the job.

That is, nevertheless, open to question. Misgivings about the choice of Raborn are not based on his ability as an administrator, which was demonstrated by his direction of the Polaris missile weapons system development program. The question raised by the appointment is whether it is wise to have a military man at the head of the CIA, which is a civilian agency despite its quasi-military aspects.

This is a matter of governmental philosophy, and has nothing to do with Raborn's personal qualifications for the job. There is reason to think that he will do well in what is essentially an administrative position. But this does not alter the fact that he is a military career man, whose thinking is inescapably colored by that lifetime involvement.

Though several military heroes have been elected president, Americans traditionally have been reluctant to have military men in top decision-making positions in the federal government. It is a part of this tradition that ultimate civilian control over the military has always been maintained. The tradition is soundly based. In our opinion, Mr. Johnson would have done better to choose another civilian as successor to McCone.